

The Cleveland May Day Riot

What to Do

By the REV. WORTH M. TIPPY

[Dr. Tippy, who was formerly pastor of Epworth Church, Cleveland, and is now at the head of the Department of Social Service in the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, was an eyewitness of the bloody outbreak in Cleveland on May Day.]

MANY of the delegates to the Interchurch World Conference in Cleveland were caught in the riot which broke up the Socialist May Day demonstration Thursday noon. Thousands of marching men and women passed through dense crowds of spectators without molestation until the head of the column reached the Public Square, when the riot broke forth.

Intense feeling had prevailed in the city on account of the boldness of the radical propaganda. The Socialist party of Cleveland is in control of the left wing and had declared for the Soviet revolution. Its leaders had been holding great mass meetings on the streets in various parts of the city and openly advocating the revolution. In the procession thousands carried red flags and many of the men wore red neckties and red bands around their hats, while two soldiers on horseback, one carrying an American flag, one a red flag, headed the column. The placards carried by the marchers were equally outspoken. Scores of them bore these legends:

Long Live the
Socialist
Republic
of Russia
and Hungary

The Workers'
Road to Freedom
Dictatorship
of the
Proletariat

The fight began at the head of the column, when an A. E. F. officer snatched the red flag from the man on horseback, but it broke out spontaneously along the long line as far back as Huron Road. The crowd rushed the parade. Red flags and placards were wrenched from the hands of the marchers and torn into shreds and fragments. The men of the procession and the spectators engaged in fierce fighting and the procession was swept from the streets. Soldiers and sailors in auto trucks and an armored car from the Liberty Loan demonstration, bore down through the streets, cheering and fighting. Into this mêlée the police charged on foot and mounted, using their maces on civilians and marchers alike and suffering many casualties themselves. On the whole they acted admirably and soon had the disorder under control. When it was over, the streets were littered with the débris of torn flags, placards and flagstaves, and

ambulances were rushing wounded men to the hospitals.

That there was no great loss of life was due to the police and to the temper of both the demonstrators and spectators. A considerable part of the marchers, as I learned the next day at labor headquarters, were not Socialists, but workers who had gone in for a holiday demonstration, not realizing the danger which lay in the extremes of the Reds. The soldiers, sailors and citizens were determined to make an end of the demonstration, but few of them were bloodthirsty, even in the excitement of the fighting, and soon quieted down. The marchers at Ninth and Euclid, where I was caught in the turmoil, were surprised and alarmed and quickly sought ways of escape.

What Citizens Thought the Day After

I remained over on Friday to determine, if possible, the strength of the demonstration and the effect of the riot on public opinion. I found that citizens, while regretting the violence, were glad of what had happened. It was, they said, an expression of Americanism and would teach the Bolshevik group that even in this seventy-per-cent foreign-born city the people are against Socialism and especially against revolution.

I was more concerned, however, at the effect of the riot upon labor sentiment, but I found the same point of view among the non-Socialist labor men. As one of the influential union leaders said to me: "It will teach the Reds a lesson. They have not realized what they were up against. They are nearly all foreigners, and we think that if they don't like this country they should go back from whence they came." The president of the Federation of Labor and other union leaders came out the next day with public statements condemning the Bolshevism of the parade.

These May Day demonstrations in Cleveland and other cities should serve to crystallize public opinion and should lead to the formation of a program of social action, which should not be so much a method to combat Bolshevism as a positive program of reconstruction, aiming at social justice and the welfare of the masses.

It is, I think, perfectly clear that a fanatical propaganda must be restrained finally by a reserve of force, by a disciplined police and thoroughly trained State and federal troops. It is highly undesirable that private citizens or groups of vigilantes should assume, or find it necessary, to take the law into their own hands. It is also important, especially in the States of the Northwest, that legislators, judges, public officials and police officers should act firmly but justly, without bluster and without unnecessary violence. Workingmen are convinced that they do not get an equal chance before the law, and it is highly desirable that the feeling should be removed.

The Cleveland demonstrators were nine tenths foreign born, mainly Russian and Hungarian. That fact spells Americanization. They have come out of oppression and are real proletarians. They must be taught to speak, read and write English and to know American history, ideals and contemporary life. They must be treated as brothers, protected against long hours and low wages and secure good housing, clean recreation and an

uplifting social environment. A Cleveland manufacturer said to me on the day of the riot that it is next to impossible to introduce co-operative shop management in a plant where there are large numbers of unskilled workers of various nationalities until they have been Americanized.

The Most Urgent Question Before the World

The appeal to class consciousness in the Cleveland parade brings out the fact that in some respects the most urgent question before the world at the present time is the method of social reconstruction—shall it be by constitutional and peaceable methods or by class struggle, violence and revolution? Shall we be willing to suddenly overturn the social order, according to untried theories of industrial and political organization, or shall we proceed by social experimentation, going as far as experience demonstrates to be necessary and desirable? In America, where the people have political rights and freedom of discussion and association, and can do finally whatever they will, there is every reason for following the second method. America is at the present time overwhelmingly against any form of collectivist state.

The doctrine of the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat are fundamentally opposed to the spirit and teaching of Christ. It is not enough to say that those who advocate these methods aim at the abolition of classes. The class struggle is a reversion to barbaric society, and results, in practice, in breaking up the social organism, even of the radical group, into bitterly antagonistic factions. This has been shown abundantly in Russia, Germany and Hungary. The dictatorship of the proletariat is as abhorrent as any other dictatorship.

The hope of the world is in co-operation of groups and classes and the submergence of classes not in violence and murder, but in an expanding brotherhood. That is supremely the task of Christianity. The Church should therefore use its vast educational force, first uncompromisingly against the class struggle; second, in the advocacy of the co-operation of classes. This should be carried at once and powerfully into the pulpit, the Sunday school, men's clubs, young people's societies, the Church press and upon the streets. The teaching should be uncompromising and aggressive, but reasoned, kindly and without violent language. I am sure that two thirds of the men of the Cleveland May Day demonstration are open to that sort of teaching. They had good plain faces, but seemed alien and out of place, like strangers in a strange land.

The Basic Difficulty

But the problem of social unrest lies deeper than Americanization. The basic difficulty, as has been said in a recent statement, "is the denial to labor of a share in industrial management. Controversies over wages and hours never go to the root of the industrial problem. Democracy must be applied to the government of industry no less than to the government of nations.

"Employers of labor must come to recognize that the workers' protest against the present wage system as a kind of slavery is

more than an exaggerated slogan of propagandists. Under modern conditions of large production, when the workers have no voice except to be hired and fired, a real bondage results, on account of which there is inevitable friction and revolt. The principles which underlie American society would inevitably lead to such revolt.

"It is erroneous, however, to say that wage slavery cannot be abolished except by a complete overturning of the present economic organization of society. It can be done away by assuring the workers, as rapidly as it can be accomplished with efficiency, a fair share in management by collective bargaining and a share in control, especially where they are directly concerned; opportunity for ownership by provision for the purchase of stock, and profit sharing, or by a combination of control and ownership in co-operative production."

Along with participation in management and ownership must go the short-hour day; the minimum living wage, which shall lift unskilled labor above poverty and into freedom; the control of unemployment by a great system of federal labor exchanges, unemployment insurance, public works, land settlement and the reduction of seasoned industries; equal pay and equal opportunity for industrial women; equal pay and equal industrial opportunity for Negro labor.

Positive Reforms Necessary

These positive reforms, coupled with nation-wide education of the foreign-born workers and their families in the American idea and method and against the Bolshevik idea and method, will bring the absolutely necessary social reconstruction without violence and without tearing up American institutions.

It is high time that the Church finds its own program and takes its place in the vast co-operation of social reconstruction. We are halting now between conflicting radical, liberal and conservative opinions. We should take our stand on the spirit and teachings of Christ and go where they lead us. I have endeavored to outline where I conceive that will be. What is needed is for ministers and laymen to get together in thousands of communities for aggressive community action by the churches.

The Church should also begin at once a movement back to the working people. There is more estrangement and lack of contact than is good for either the workers, the Church or the public welfare. We need to resurvey the crowded areas of industrial centers, close out as soon as possible little competing missions, lay out non-competing parishes and erect large, well-appointed seven-day churches. We shall have to select and train a new type of pastor, men who love working people and understand them, who know economics and social work as they know the Bible, who desire to devote their lives to the struggle of the workers for fullness of life. These churches will be strongest if they are democratic, controlled by their members and staffs and not held in tutelage as missions. Above all, the members of these churches must feel the warm heart of the Church and realize that it is with them in their aspirations for freedom and opportunity.

NEW YORK CITY